

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

Securing America's Transportation Systems: The Target of Terrorists and TSA's New Direction

September 23, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee hearing entitled "Securing America's Transportation Systems: The Target of Terrorists and TSA's New Direction":

"I want to congratulate and thank Mr. Pistole for his willingness to lead one of the most important agencies in our government.

Although TSA has only been in existence for less than ten years, its impact on the worldwide traveling public, particularly here in the U.S., cannot be understated.

TSA's mission makes it one of the most critically challenging agencies to lead.

I am confident that Mr. Pistole can effectively lead this agency and improve the way TSA functions across all modes, improving security, strengthening coordination with other agencies and stakeholders, and spearheading the efficient deployment of security technology.

Since the start of this Congress, this Subcommittee has held several hearings addressing transportation security issues.

We have encouraged TSA to devote more attention and resources to surface transportation security; the implementation of cargo screening programs; and the efficient development and deployment of checkpoint technologies.

As a result, we have learned valuable information from TSA and stakeholders regarding successful programs and the need to improve others.

We have also had many conversations about TSA's need to work collaboratively with other agencies and stakeholders. I hope you will continue to strengthen the agency's relationships with stakeholders.

One of my chief concerns with TSA has been the need to update security checkpoints with adequate technology and enhanced processes that afford greater security and efficient passenger throughput.

The deployment of technology must be done with thorough consultation. Last March, the

Committee requested that TSA submit an AIT deployment plan for this year, and I understand that we received it this morning.

Because of this, it appears that TSA has deployed AIT to airports on an ad-hoc basis without considering threat or a risk-based approach.

With regard to the TSOs, TSA must empower its workforce and find ways to improve morale across the agency.

The TSA workforce has endured unfavorable working conditions for too long. This has led to low morale and a lack of trust between them and supervisors and agency officials.

I am eager to work with you to find a solution that will empower our TSA workforce and provide them with the best available training and workforce development.

But I would be remiss if I only mentioned the problems at TSA, and not the successes.

First Observer is an effective security initiative that trains and empowers highway and motor carrier employees to detect suspicious activity that may lead to acts of terrorism.

The collaborative approach of the program and its emphasis on leveraging the skills and experience of transportation professionals has earned the endorsements of a wide array of highway and motor carrier stakeholders.

Additionally, I commend the Office of Global Strategies for its commitment to ensure that the United States strengthens existing relationships with our international partners.

This office has played a critical role with foreign partners in aviation security—particularly after the attack on December 25th.

There is clearly a lot of work to do, and we want to be helpful partners in getting the job done.”

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